

OPINION



BY MUNA KHAN

It’s too political

I’M surprised the lords ruling my algorithm did not alert me about Jan Komasa’s film *Anniversary*, or that it didn’t receive the media attention it deserved. I read up on it and found that the distributor Lionsgate may have buried the political thriller in November fearing a backlash from Trump supporters. It had a limited release and was low profile. “It’s hard to market a political film today,” one of the producers told *The Wrap*. “People are afraid of them.”

Anniversary is about an American family that is hounded following the rise of an authoritarian government. The twist — a book by their daughter-in-law ignited the fire that ultimately saw the rise of this regime and the destruction of everything it pretended to stand for. We watch the family come undone over a five-year period.

Diane Lane plays Ellen, a professor at a prestigious university whose former student Liz publishes *The Change*, a book claiming to unite a divided people by putting people in the centre. Liz wrote about a single-party rule but Ellen understood what she was advocating — authoritarian rule.

The Change gets picked up by a right-wing party that uses it as a manifesto to rise to power and Liz begins work at a think tank that champions *The Change* as a way of life. Things worsen when Liz marries Ellen’s son, Josh, who rises in the ranks of that think tank, going against everything his progressive family stands for. His sister, a comedian, is hounded by *Change* supporters and goes into hiding; all kinds of pressure tactics are used on her parents and siblings to try to find her. They resist all the draconian measures this regime puts out and suffer — job losses, social ostracisation, fear of violence.

The Changers want to restore order, go back to a time where “they” were right. This sounds all too familiar a story for us in the subcontinent. It is what has been said here time and again when “democratic” governments are kicked out. A harkening to Hindutva rule is what got Narendra Modi’s star to rise. In Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa claimed his actions were in the name of protecting Sinhala identity. Shaikh Hasina used the 1971 events to consolidate her power.

‘You are either with us or against us’ has become a way to govern, threaten, harass, disappear, jail, hurt and hurt badly. And just like authoritarians have allies in the form of the media across the region, we see think tanks manufacturing consent for the Change regime in the film. The American flag is redesigned in *Anniversary* with the stars placed in the centre to reflect a more unified nation, when nothing could be fur-

ther from the truth. We’re all too familiar here with the way symbols have been used to further a narrative, ‘strengthen’ an identity, redefine what it means to be Indian, Bangladeshi, etc.

State surveillance in *Anniversary* has a familiar ring. Census takers enter Ellen’s home threatening to use one daughter’s photos at a protest unless the couple endorses the regime. Ellen capitulates to save one child. It is not dissimilar to mid-night knocks across South Asia, our families disappeared, our journalists killed, dissidents exiled.

Art imitates life after Ellen’s rejection of Liz’s thesis as “dangerous” led to Liz destroying that family. Many authoritarian figures’ stories begin with feeling rejected, unaccepted, ridiculed or feeling like a failure. Many then become driven by revenge, as is the case with dynastic politics in our part of the world where personal grievance drives a justification to control.

What happens to those who attempt to oppose or challenge the Changers? They meet the same fate as the thousands who disappear in Balochistan, or Bangladesh, or the Kashmir in India. The wealthy can always leave, as can dual nationals. Many die trying to escape treacherous borders.

Those who have nowhere to go and try to resist find themselves isolated. Everyone is a potential whistleblower. With no one to resist the Changers, the regime’s authoritarian tactics increase. Curfews, drones watching your every move, militarised police ever on the ready to take you away.

There is a warning here about our initial dismissal of the first signs of polarisation. It’s just a difference of opinion we’ll think even if that difference ravages our family WhatsApp groups or gatherings. Ellen is right to be sceptical of Liz and is tragically proved right.

History reminds us that the premise of movies like *Anniversary* is not a far-fetched idea. We already know what we can’t talk about in the subcontinent so we won’t make movies that reflect our reality. I salute writers making art that challenges social taboos which is deeply political but I’m talking about the topics that are off limits.

It’s hard to make a political film here too. ■

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BY ARIF HASAN

Karachi flyovers

FLYOVERS are being demolished all over the world because they are considered ugly and they break the openness of the city. The space they occupy is being turned into parks and recreational areas. This is being done through spatial reorganisation of the city, and by realising that building them is the most expensive way of trying to solve traffic-related issues.

When Karachi flyovers were first planned, there were professionals and civil society members who pointed out that they would solve traffic problems at non-rush hours. But at rush hours, they would increase them considerably. And today, conditions at rush hours at various nodes have become much worse than earlier — not only because of an increase of cars.

I can give a few examples of what has happened in the West, as I am sure that some readers are acquainted with the places I am going to mention. These projects are part of a larger city strategy to reclaim public space. In the US, the Waterfront Park in Oregon is on a demolished freeway, and so is the West Side Highway in New York. Meanwhile, many US cities have proposals to remove elevated highways, converting them into public spaces, such as the Hudson River Park.

Similarly, France has turned expressways and elevated roads in Paris into green areas and pedestrian precincts. In the UK, too, in a number of areas, elevated highways have been demolished, creating public spaces, better environmental conditions and neighbourhood open spaces. This has also become a policy for the future. Many of these areas, such as the Hammersmith flyover, which Karachi residents use on the journey to Heathrow on their way back to Pakistan, are also set to be demolished. However, the city most active in replacing flyovers and expressways with public space is Seoul in Korea. In the past decades, it has demolished some 18 flyovers and converted them into public spaces. Seoul hopes to achieve neighbourhoods where the dominance of automobiles and concrete structures is replaced by an environmentally friendly city. Seoul has a population of 10.26 million.

Let’s come back to Karachi, which has built 43 flyovers in the last two decades. The FTC flyover opened to traffic in October 2004. It cost Rs109.4 million. Taking this as an average, the cost of these flyovers works out to around Rs5 billion, not taking inflation into consideration. They have not solved Karachi’s problems, and most of them were unnecessary, even

to the then head of the traffic engineering bureau of the KDA, who was of the opinion that the decision to build the flyovers was not a technical but a political one.

As proof of this, there is the issue of the Gurumandir traffic management problem. Five roads converge at Gurumandir. A complex system of flyovers was envisaged for this and supported by the then president. The approximate cost worked out to Rs300m. However, the problem was solved very effectively by a traffic management and engineering solution with no flyovers, at a fraction of the calculated cost. Many professionals also feel that the flyovers help us in spending the loans that we take from IFIs.

Apart from aesthetics, the negative spaces created under the flyovers could have been used for public use (such as sports activities, parks for low-income communities, women’s toilets) instead of charity *dastarkhwhans* and disorganised car parks. These are very large spaces, and with proper planning and no flyovers, they can still be used for public use. I am not advocating for their demolition, but for a public use of the spaces under them, and in future, the location of flyovers being decided on technical considerations and not for political and financial favours.

The cost of flyovers is added to by unnecessarily painting them with various motives of questionable aesthetic design. All over the world, most flyovers are finished in grey concrete so that the world of automobiles and buildings stands out in contrast, and the cost of repainting them periodically does not arise. The Lyari Expressway is 16.5 kilometres long. It is painted on both sides. The cost of this exercise works out to nearly Rs20m. It will have to be periodically painted, costing a huge financial loss to state agencies.

It is hoped that the lessons learned by the rest of the world are taken into consideration in the future, along with the points that have been raised in this article, when designing the location and deciding on the necessity of having a flyover. As a result, large volumes of land parcels can be used for the benefit of the majority of the people of the city, and not inappropriate and expensive solutions for the benefit of its elite. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 Fifty years ago

‘Israeli attack imminent’

LONDON: Arab League Secretary-General Mahmud Riad warned again ... of a massive Israeli attack against southern Lebanon declaring that such an attack was now “imminent”. And Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said ... last night [Jan 10] that Israel would not tolerate outside intervention in the Lebanon. Dr Riad, in an interview published by Cairo’s semi-official “Al-Ahram”, said the expected Israeli attack would have dire consequences for the Arab “confrontation” States — Egypt, Syria, Jordan and perhaps Iraq. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, according to news agencies in Peking,] The Chinese people today [Jan 10] appeared to be following the call of the Government and the Communist Party Central Committee to derive “strength from our grief” following the death ... of ... Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. ... A Chinese official said: “We are deeply sad. In my district everyone wept on learning the news, but now we must transform our affliction into production.” The Chinese people went to work as usual today — their faces mostly grave and an air of sadness reigned in the Chinese Capital beneath a laden sky.

1951 Seventy-five years ago

Six-year plan

KARACHI: The first National Planning Commission entrusted with the task of implementing the Six-Year National Development Plan of Pakistan, has been appointed by the Government ... it was ... learned in Karachi yesterday [Jan 10]. The Commission is scheduled to hold its first meeting in Karachi on Jan 29. A few days after the first meeting of the Commission, the Autonomous Council for the Six-Year Plan will hold its first meeting in Karachi under ... Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan.

The Council, which was formed recently, has the Prime Minister as its Chairman, the Finance Minister as its Vice-Chairman, and the Ministers for Food and Agriculture, Communication, Commerce and Industries as the members. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, according to news agencies in Karachi,] Pakistan expects to get more than 600,000 dollars from the USA under the Point Four Programme for Technical Assistance, competent sources said... An agreement between the Government will be signed in Karachi “very shortly”... The American Ambassador in Karachi, Mr Avra Warren will sign the agreement on behalf of the United States Government, while an official of the Foreign Office will sign it on behalf of Pakistan. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.



A world gripped by titanic uncertainty

THE first few days of 2026 have offered a stark illustration of how rapidly the global order is changing. The decisive action by the United States against Venezuelan President Nicol s Maduro — taken at the very moment a Chinese delegation was arriving in Caracas — was more than a tactical move. It was a clear signal that the administration of President Donald Trump is implementing the priorities outlined in its National Security Strategy published in November last year. That document marked a decisive turn inward, reviving what many analysts now describe as a modernised Monroe Doctrine, with the Western Hemisphere once again treated as America’s primary strategic domain. This approach, sometimes described as

the ‘Trump Corollary’, suggests that the US reserves the right to intervene directly to secure its interests in its immediate sphere of influence. The implications extend far beyond Latin America. The message to Washington’s adversaries — and even its allies — is unmistakable: do not expect rescue if you fall outside America’s core strategic priorities.

This raises unsettling questions. Does this strategy imply that partners of Russia or China may be left exposed in future crises? Could Iran be the next in line, particularly given long-standing Israeli calls for regime change? And, if Venezuela and Iran — both major oil suppliers to China — are neutralised, does this increase the likelihood of heightened tensions over Taiwan?

Control over Venezuela would also grant Washington extraordinary leverage over global energy markets. With access to the world’s largest proven oil reserves, the United States could influence prices in ways that directly affect oil-dependent economies, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia. Trump has repeatedly emphasised the need for pumping more oil to lower oil prices to tame inflation at home. Combined with pressure for lower interest rates and potential political influence over the Federal Reserve, such a strategy could have far-reaching consequences.

As 2026 unfolds, Pakistan must read the signals carefully. The emerging global order appears less rule-based and more transactional. In such an environment, internal stability, economic resilience, and diplomatic balance will be critical.

Pakistan would do well to recall Henry Kissinger’s words about small states surviving not by choosing sides in great-power rivalries, but by carefully preserving room to manoeuvre in an uncertain world.

Adil Hanif Godil
London

The real tennis GOAT

THIS is with reference to the article ‘The GOAT of Pak tennis’ (EOS, Dec 7). Epithets like ‘greatest of all time’ (GOAT) should be used with circumspection after drawing realistic comparison with the past greats. While there is no doubt about the achievements and talent of Aisamul Haq Qureshi, he by no means can be termed the greatest Pakistani tennis player of all times. The appellation, if justice is to be done, should rightly go to Haroon Rahim, who was the youngest Davis Cup player for Pakistan, before he went on to win international titles in both singles and doubles. In singles, he is the only Pakistani to achieve the world ranking of 34, which he did in the late 1970s while playing with and against giants like Jimmy Connors. Aisam’s highest ranking in singles has been 125.

In fact, Haroon Rahim beat Connors in one of the tournaments. He also reached the Wimbledon’s third round and the quarter-finals of the US Open in an era when the prodigiously talented players like Connors, John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg were active. In fact, Borg, whom Haroon had faced a few times, did mention his name among potential giant-killers on the circuit. A naturally talented serve-and-volley player, Haroon was a sheer delight to watch, and rightly deserves to be named the GOAT of Pakistan tennis.

Dr Raashid Wali Janjua
Islamabad

Banking woes

MY credit report on Nov 11 showed overdue entries against my bank credit card ending 9426, despite the card having been fully settled on Dec 2, 2020. For nearly five years,

monthly statements from January 2021 to November 2025 reflected a continuous credit balance, confirming no outstanding liability. I filed formal complaints with my bank (C1211250395 and C2811250212) and also lodged a complaint with the Sunwai portal of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) (No 145296, dated Nov 27, 2025), but I have received no substantive resolution.

Attempts to escalate the issue were repeatedly blocked, and emails to senior officers bounced due to internal restrictions. I was shuffled between branches and departments; and contradictory responses were issued, including an unsubstantiated claim of an overdue amount of Rs2,845.35. Even after personally visiting the bank’s branch on Karachi’s Abdullah Haroon Road and meeting officials, the bank refused to issue a no objection certificate (NOC).

This situation reflects not just a personal hardship, but a systemic breakdown in consumer protection and grievance redressal. Incorrect credit reporting can destroy reputations, hinder business operations, and cause professional damage. There must be stricter enforcement by the SBP and the banking ombudsman to effectively ensure timely dispute resolution.

Athar Nazir Shaikh
Karachi

Gas shortages

IT is common these days to start one’s day without a simple breakfast owing to gas loadshedding. No tea, no warm meal, no choice but to either wait for gas supply to resume or leave the house hungry. This has become Pakistan’s new normal. In many parts of the country, gas is supplied only for a few hours, and often at odd times. Even when the supply is available, the pressure is just not good enough to cook a proper meal.

Daily life has been adjusted around this worsening shortage simply because most people have no alternative. Meals are planned around supply windows, chores are postponed, and mornings begin with frustration instead of routine. Winter only makes this situation harsher. The cold already slows life down, and the absence of gas makes even basic tasks tougher. Electric households are not a real solution for many households because power-sector loadshedding is even worse.

What makes the matter more difficult is the lack of clarity. People are expected to manage, but are rarely told how long these shortages will continue or what long-term solutions are being worked on.

Access to gas is not a luxury. If shortages are unavoidable, transparency and realistic planning are the least the public deserves. Living without certainty over such a basic utility should not be normalised.

Maryam Rehan
Karachi



Wasting time in futile debates

RECENTLY, a video went viral in which two South Asian individuals were trying to prove or disprove the existence of God. To me, such a discussion is naivety of the highest order. Such debates are never conclusive or productive. Human beings, whether religious or otherwise, are unlikely to budge once they attach themselves emotionally to an idea.

People are emotional about their convictions. In our part of the world, emotions play a role in shaping people’s beliefs in every field. In our region, even science is promoted like a religion; it is claimed to be nothing, but objective knowledge that must be followed ‘religiously’, which is itself an emotional, non-objective statement. For an emotional being, trying to prove or disprove the existence of God is like someone born blind discussing colours. Human beings understand things from a reference point, whereas God is unique. I wonder how one can understand an entity that is beyond human faculties. Therefore, the only way forward is for believers and non-believers to leave each other alone. Arguing about this will get us nowhere.

Shakeel Ahmed Nizamani
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External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn*’s External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers’ complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn*’s code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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